

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 KUWAIT 001863

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/ARPI

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/03/2015

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KWMN](#) [SOCI](#) [KU](#) [WOMEN](#) [POLITICAL](#) [RIGHTS](#)

SUBJECT: WOMEN SPLIT ON FUTURE OF POLITICAL RIGHTS, SOME
BELIEVE BILL WILL PASS IN TWO WEEKS

REF: A. KUWAIT 1836

[B](#). KUWAIT 1808

[C](#). 04 KUWAIT 949

Classified By: DCM Matt Tueller for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: During several meetings with women's rights activists and supporters on May 4, PolOffs noted varying differences in opinion on the chances of success for women's political rights. Several expressed little hope that the two-week delay requested by Prime Minister Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah would result in any meaningful change. Others were almost certain that the time is being used by the GOK to make deals with Members of Parliament (MPs) in order to ensure legislative success for women's Municipal Council political rights when Parliament reconvenes May 16. All expressed frustration with the political maneuvering that took place during the Parliamentary sessions on May 2 and 3 and most thought the GOK did not do enough to guarantee the success of the bill. All remarked to PolOffs that if the measure ultimately fails, it would be the Government's fault. Throughout the conversations PolOffs reiterated the Embassy's firm support for the rights of women everywhere to be full participants in the political life of their countries. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (SBU) During a series of May 4 discussions with women's rights activists and supporters, PolOffs received mixed assessments of the possibility for success of the bill that would grant women full political rights at the Municipal Council level. Although there was uncertainty about the legal standing of the vote on municipal elections, all the activists we spoke with questioned the sincerity of the Government's professed interest in granting women political rights after the May 2 vote ended inconclusively and under unusual circumstances. The May 2 vote, during which pro-government MPs opted to abstain in large numbers from supporting an amendment granting women voting rights in municipal elections was the latest missed opportunity for the GOK to back up public claims that expanding suffrage to include women is among its top priorities (refs A and B).

Some Have Little Hope...

[1](#)3. (C) Professor of Political Science Dr. Maryam Hasan Al-Kandari expressed little hope that women would get their rights when the National Assembly convenes on May 16. She was discouraged by the vote and said that many MPs view women in general as second-class citizens. She also expressed frustration that the women's organizations were not doing more to publicly pursue the issue of women's rights. Referring to fact that women's groups have done little since the women's political rally in front of the National Assembly on March 7, she said the political activities of women's organizations are like a balloon popping, and even when they pop, she said "they don't make any sound."

[1](#)4. (C) Dr. Haila Al-Mekaimi, a young professor of political science at Kuwait University told PolOff that she was very disappointed with the outcome of the parliamentary vote. She opined that the vote on women's political rights illustrated the lack of any serious GOK vision. She claimed that the failure of the vote in favor of women's rights is the result of a troubled political system. Stating that Kuwait is no longer behaving like a parliamentary monarchy, she explained that it is now a government of coalitions. She said all issues are settled by ad hoc coalitions that are formed around Cabinet power bases currently: PM Shaykh Sabah, Energy Minister Shaykh Ahmad Al-Fahd Al-Sabah, Minister of State for Cabinet and Parliamentary Affairs Dhaiffalah Sharar, and the young but influential Shaykh Mohammed Al-Abdullah Al-Mubarak.

[1](#)5. (C) Secretary General of the Women's Cultural and Social Society and women's rights activist Lulwa Al-Mulla expressed great disappointment about the parliamentary vote and held out little hope of any near-term success. She now questions whether the GOK was ever serious about the issue of women's rights saying she was insulted by the manner in which the vote took place. She thinks the petty politics that appeared to mark the voting process cheapened the important issue of women's rights. She opined that the GOK wants to look serious but does little to support the enfranchisement of

women. She lamented how little the GOK has done to influence MPs on the legislation.

16. (C) Al-Mulla was also concerned that if women gained their political rights at the Municipal Council level that the political forces would be satisfied with the partial victory and would not pursue women's rights at a national level. She stated that PM Shaykh Sabah must be firm on this issue for it to pass, but speculated that perhaps he could not succeed on this issue without giving more than he is willing to in exchange for MP support.

...While Others See Success On The Horizon

17. (C) Kuwait University Professor of Sociology Dr. Lubna Al-Kazi believes that the vote was a "big game." She said that there were far too many abstentions from MPs whom she knows support women's political rights for it not to be an "orchestrated tactic." She explained that most of the MPs who abstained did so because the GOK did not offer them anything in return for their support. Those MPs, she explained, are looking forward to cutting a deal with the GOK in the next two weeks to vote in favor of the municipal rights bill in return for government acquiescence on other issues, possibly including agreeing to a national pay raise, forgiveness of electricity bill debt, lowering the voting age to 18, and granting voting rights to members of the police and the military. (Note: Should the members of the police and military, now denied the right to vote or run for office, gain their political rights, this would directly politically benefit the rural bedouin tribes because the majority of the personnel in these organizations are drawn from their ranks. End Note.) Dr. Lubna said that she knows for example, that MP Bader Shaykhan Al-Farsi supports women's political rights; when he and others like him abstained, she was convinced that what was occurring was a political tactic. She expects that a deal will be arranged to ensure passage of the measure. (Note: An EmbOff present in Parliament during the May 3 session was told cryptically by MP Bader Al-Farsi as he was walking out of the Assembly to not worry because "it will pass in two weeks." End Note.)

18. (C) Women's rights activist and head of the Kuwait Economics Society Dr. Rola Dashti said that the session was "chaos" and that no one knew what was going on. She said this was complicated by the fact that while the PM is truly committed to passing women's rights, many of his Ministers are not. Specifically, she accused Minister Sharar of lobbying against the amendment and then reporting to PM Shaykh Sabah that they did not have enough votes. Calling the process "frustrating," she said there was "lots of maneuvering" going on behind the scenes. At one point, she noticed Energy Minister Shaykh Ahmad Al-Fahad sitting next to Shi'a MPs Saleh Ashour and Sayed Al-Qallaf, who then changed their votes from abstentions to no votes.

19. (C) Dr. Rola said she is "95 percent sure" that the scheduled vote in two weeks would result in women getting the vote, but that another measure on the postponement of scheduled June Municipal Council elections would not pass. Nonetheless, she said things may have worked out better this way, as women will have "ample time" to organize for 2009 and will stand a higher chance of being elected than if they had only a few weeks to prepare. She said that she is almost positive that the GOK intends to install a female member on the Municipal Council after the elections. She noted that the female Undersecretary of the Ministry of Planning had attended Municipal Council meetings before, but this had received little attention. (Note: The GOK appoints 6 of the 16 seats on the Municipal Council. End Note.)

10. (C) Likewise, writer and professor Dr. Siham Al-Furaih, was not surprised by the May 2 and 3 events, lamenting that Kuwaiti women have been through this before. She remained optimistic, however, that Kuwaiti women would receive the right to vote before the 2007 end of the parliamentary term.

PM Either Not Serious Or Engaged In Deal-Making

11. (C) Comment: Prime Minister Shaykh Sabah undoubtedly did not make a strong effort to secure passage of this amendment. The PM allowed his Social Affairs Minister to be out of the country during the voting, permitted his Salafi Justice Minister to be absent from the session, and has thus far chosen not to appoint a replacement Health Minister since the resignation of Mohammed Jarallah. Further, some have noted the absence of serious deal-making with MPs on the part of the Cabinet, especially when compared to the strong effort made to save former Finance Minister Mahmoud Al-Nouri from a Parliamentary vote of no-confidence in March 2004 (ref C). The abstentions by many of the pro-Government MPs on May 2 also did little to convince most that the votes were legitimately cast and not part of a larger political strategy engineered by the GOK. These political machinations call

into question the seriousness of PM Shaykh Sabah's public comments hailing women's political rights as one of his top priorities. That said, post finds it plausible that the GOK will use the two weeks before the next Parliamentary session to secure promises of support on the amendment, should a re-vote occur.

Visit Embassy Kuwait's Classified Website:
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/kuwait/>

You can also access this site through the
State Department's Classified SIPRNET website

LEBARON